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**REVIEW: *TIBETAN LITERARY GENRES, TEXTS, AND TEXT TYPES***

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Jim Rheingans (ed). 2015. *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation*. Leiden: Brill. Xi + 293. Preface, list of contributors, index. ISBN 978-90-04-30099-6. Hardcopy 109EURO.

Intended as a follow-up to Cabezón and Jackson's groundbreaking *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (1996), *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation* aims to deepen our understandings of Tibetan literature by approaching Tibetan text types from systematic and historical perspectives. Growing out of a conference panel at the twelfth Tibetan Studies seminar, the book explores both pre-modern and contemporary genres, as well as issues of classification and methodologies. In doing so, this collection of essays edited by Jim Rheingans covers a great deal of new ground in terms of discussions of terminology, definitions, and the theoretical landscape pertaining to literature, genre, text boundaries, and typologies in the field of Tibetan literature.

Neatly organized by way of a short preface, list of contributors, introduction, ten essays, and an index, the book is divided into four parts, each dealing with a clearly defined area of inquiry. Over the course of 293 pages, it moves swiftly from the general to the specific across a variety of texts that include songs and poetry, offering-ritual, hagiography, lexicographical texts, and modern literature, in an accessible and structured manner.

The book begins with an introductory essay from Jim Rheingans that unpacks key conceptual and terminological underpinnings informing the contributions that follow. He describes

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the various forms of classifications that have figured across Tibetan literary scenes, both pre-modern and contemporary, and provides a pithy literature review of relevant scholarship and academic approaches to Tibetan literature. He notes that while there is a growing number of publications on modern Tibetan literature, the issue of systematizing Tibetan literary genre remains relatively neglected. Throughout this introduction, Rheingans makes a compelling argument for a more thorough and consistent research of Tibetan literary genres, noting that it would work towards offering a broader and more comprehensive picture of Tibet's literary heritage.

Part One, "Classifying Tibetan Texts and Topoi," deals with genre typologies and reflects on overall issues and challenges of classifying Tibetan texts. It begins with a paper by Ulrike Roesler that presents a helpful survey of some traditional and contemporary ways of categorizing Tibetan literature. Describing classification systems found in early Tibetan catalogues as well as a number of other sources, Roesler finds traditional Tibetan scholarship to have been deeply influenced by Indian concepts and to have a clear focus on monastic learning and literature. She concludes by arguing that finding an appropriate vocabulary and theoretical framework will be an important step in enabling us to speak about Tibetan texts as literature, and to appreciate Tibetan works as art forms in their own right.

In the next paper, Ekaterina Sobkovyak offers an analysis of a genre of Tibetan literature known as *ming gi rnam grangs* 'enumeration of terms'. Focusing on the use of quotation in a text from the eminent Buddhist scholar-encyclopedist, Klong rdol bla ma (1719-1795), Sobkovyak brings to light the transmission of several classifications of the '*rig gnas*' fields of knowledge, and in doing so, argues compellingly for the importance of "establishing correspondence between quotation and original passage" (54).

In the final paper of Part One, Giacomella Orofina offers a fascinating discussion of the role of the trickster in Tibetan folk literature. She offers two different Tibetan trickster accounts and comments on their similarities with Greek and Egyptian stories. While Orofino argues that uncovering the historical foundation of the

trickster story may prove impossible, the presence of the trickster in Tibetan folk literature serves to highlight the circularity, transculturality, and fluidity that oral lores enjoyed in early Eurasian civilizations.

Part Two, "Fluid Genres and Their Reception," moves on to questions of blurred genre boundaries and examines to what extent specific genres should be classified, as well as how particular genres have historically developed. In his paper, Roger R Jackson offers a provocative discussion on what he sees as an openness and fluidity in ritual texts and perhaps Tibetan literature more broadly. He queries whether "bright lines" can ever be drawn between texts types and to what extent attempts to do so may be somewhat misguided. Taking a dGe lugs pa ritual as an example, Jackson argues that texts are often less bounded and more fluid than their location under any single title might suggest, and cautions against seeing Tibetan literature as a static and fixed entity.

In the second essay of Part Two, Ruth Gamble considers two distinct histories of the Tibetan *mgur* 'songs' genre. Tracing approaches to *mgur* in the works of Döndrup Gyal (1953-1985) and Chögyam Trungpa (1940-1987), two writers working in very different cultural and social milieus, Gamble contends that it is important to take note of the various ways literary and social criteria are both affected and shaped by interpretations and expectations of discursive communities.

Part Three, "Studies of Specific Texts and Genres," moves into more specific territory to test theses and assumptions against concrete realities. To begin this section, Franz-Karl Ehrhard's essay presents and analyses a Padmasambhava biography from the Sa skya pa School. This seventeenth century text, argues Ehrhard, illustrates a blending of the two literary genres of biography and prayer to the Precious Guru. He asserts that this particular genre mixing can be accounted for by considering the local political and cultural uncertainties of the time when gTsang kings were attempting to drive away Mongol forces and build a strong sense of Tibetan nationalism rooted in the Yarlung period. In doing so he reiterates the importance of historicizing texts

and paying close attention to the social and cultural milieu from which they hail.

The next paper in this section, written by Peter Verhagen, focuses on the "tools of the trade" used by Tibetan translators during the sNga dar and Phyi dar periods. Focusing on the lexicographical sources available to translators in Tibet, Verhagen asserts that the practice of translation in pre-modern Tibet holds promise for illuminating the various interpretative and creative processes involved in the trans-cultural enterprise of Indo-Tibetan translations.

In the final paper of this section, Victoria Sujata offers a detailed analysis of the poetic techniques in a selection of highly expressive *mgur* 'songs' from Pha bong kha pa bDe chen snying po (1878-1941). Presenting translations of four of his autobiographical songs and tracing the development of the overall shape of a *mgur*, Sujata argues that structure and meaning can be mutually reinforcing and used together to articulate a clear message.

The final section of the book, "Tradition and Modernity: Tibetan Literature in Transition," examines the question of change and continuity for genre in modern Tibetan literature. The section begins with a provocative paper from Lama Jabb who criticizes what he sees to be a very common tendency in scholarship on modern Tibetan literature to take the 1980s as the birth point of a new literary revolution. Shedding clear light on the many levels of interplay between the orality of Tibetan culture and modern literary creativity, Jabb argues against seeing the 1980s as a rupture with traditional forms of literature, and calls for greater appreciation of the enduring artistic legacies of Tibet's rich oral and literary traditions.

In the final essay of both Part Four and the book, Peter Schwieger identifies and describes what he argues to be a genre in transition. Briefly describing the tradition of Tibetan hagiographies, Schwieger swiftly moves on to a translation of a Tibetan short story dealing with ideals of hagiographies. Nowadays, claims Schwieger, Tibetan authors writing under Chinese rule are wont to contrast old and new social ideals of Tibetan life, often questioning ideals conveyed by classical Tibetan hagiographies.

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Overall this well-organized book succeeds in deepening our knowledge of Tibetan literature, offering an excellent contribution to the relatively neglected area of Tibetan textual studies. Covering a great deal of new ground and posing many crucial questions that will pave the way for further research, *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation* brings into clear view some of the core ideas and debates in the study of Tibetan textual genres and opens the doors for a greater appreciation of Tibetan literature in all its richness and complexity. A highly accessible and engaging read, the book is well worth a visit for anyone interested in Tibetan literature, while those more familiar with the field will also find much to take away.

#### REFERENCE

Cabezón, José I and Roger R Jackson (eds). 1996. *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion.